The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

The Nail Tech to LA's Hottest Influencers Is From Small-Town Russia

Olesya Kondratyeva opened her first business in Tver and now manicures supermodel Kendall Jenner's nails.

By Samantha Berkhead

April 09, 2021



Olesya Kondratyeva. **olesia_kon / Instagram**

With clients like Kendall Jenner and Hailey Bieber, Olesya Kondratyeva is one of the most in-demand nail technicians among LA's countless bloggers and influencers.

With its glitzy celebrity culture, laid-back pace, palm trees and sunshine, Los Angeles is a far cry from her birthplace Tver, a Russian city of 400,000 northwest of Moscow.

Kondratyeva, 28, studied accounting at university but never had much interest in pursuing it as a career. She was much more interested in art and design and eventually opened a nail salon in a Moscow suburb.

In 2015, she and her husband, Igor, visited the U.S. for the first time and soon became “obsessed” with the idea of moving there. After they returned to Russia, Igor won a green card, and the two traveled the country for months before settling on California.

As soon as they knew they would move to Los Angeles, Kondratyeva, who goes by the easier-to-pronounce “Lisa” in the U.S., launched an Instagram for her new nail studio and began looking for clients.

LA was primed and ready for Russian nail techniques, which prioritize quality over quick speeds and low costs. Russian nail technicians cut the cuticles, for example, so they can apply polish as close to the base of the nail as possible. The result is a longer-lasting, “perfectly smooth” manicure, Kondratyeva said.

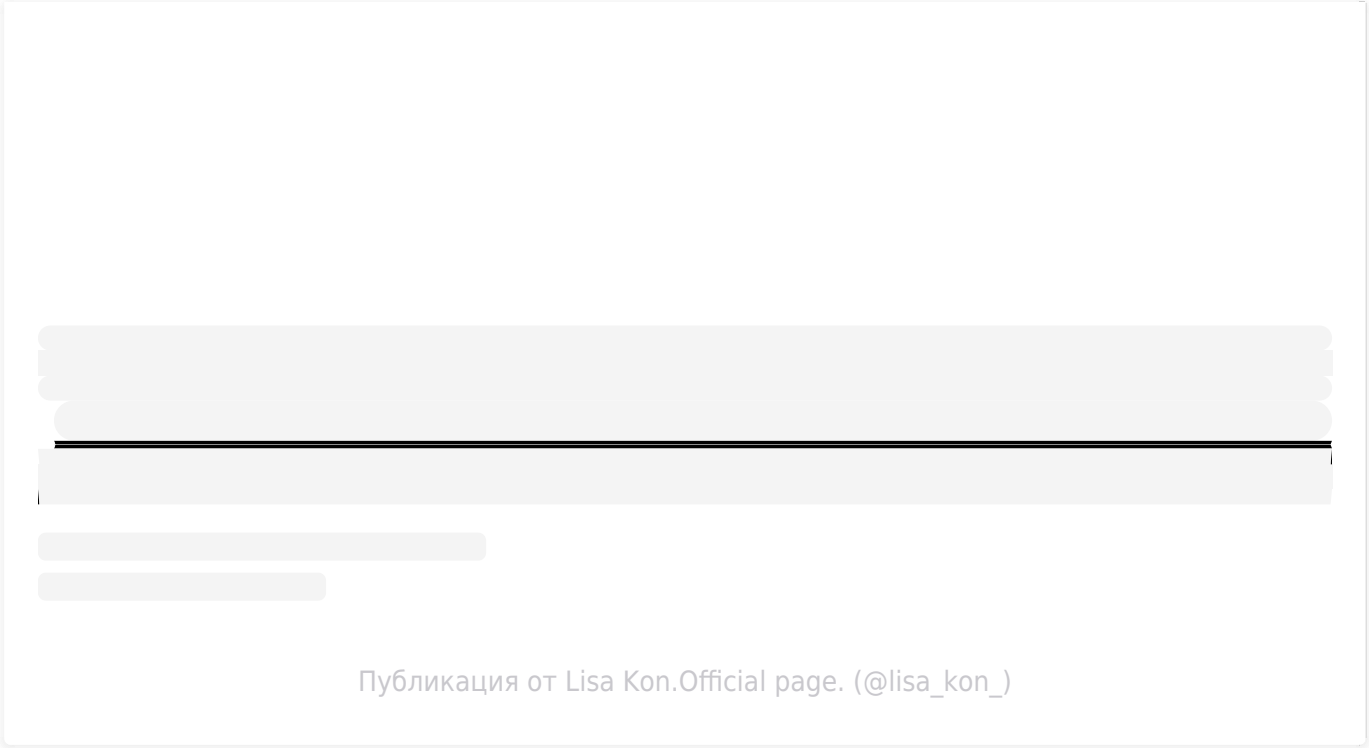
“In Russia, women are very picky; they need everything to be flawless,” she said, adding that women in the U.S. are used to very fast but lower-quality service.

“When Americans come to our salon and try out the Russian manicure technique they are, of course, shocked: ‘Wow! The color starts right next to my skin!’ They are then ready to spend more time and money because they want good service.”

Embed:



Посмотреть эту публикацию в Instagram



Through word of mouth both online and off, Kondratyeva started doing nails for influencers and bloggers with millions of followers, adorning their fingertips with glossy, ornate designs that look more like works of art than manicures. Every time an influencer posted an Instagram Story of their manicure, Kondratyeva would get new followers and new clients.

One day, one of Kondratyeva's clients from back home, the well-known Ukrainian photographer Sasha Samsonova, got her nails done before a photoshoot with Kendall and Kylie Jenner.

"We did a paw-print design and she went to do a shoot for Kendall and Kylie. That's when they saw her manicure and really liked it. As Sasha told me later, they said: 'Oh my God! Where did you get your nails done?' And then Kendall's agent contacted me and asked to come over to do her nails."

The first time she drove to the supermodel's home was nerve-wracking, Kondratyeva said, as she'd never worked with A-list celebrities before.

"There was a language barrier, which made me a bit uncomfortable. Then, they asked me to do a house call, and I usually work strictly in my studio."

She also had no idea what style of manicure Jenner preferred, so Kondratyeva brought "everything [she] possibly could" from her studio to the house call.

"In the end, it turned out that she likes [her nails] extremely simple; she doesn't do any crazy designs like glitter and crystals," she said.

Embed:

Посмотреть эту публикацию в Instagram

Публикация от Lisa Kon.Official page. (@lisa_kon_)

These days, Jenner is one of her regular clients, and Kondratyeva works with confidence. Jenner even sent her a New Year's gift this year.

“The first couple of times, we only talked business — I would ask her what shape and length she wanted. Now, I’m no longer nervous when I go to do her nails because I know exactly how she wants them. Sometimes we chat, but I can’t say that we chat a lot; we never talk about her personal life, for example. It is easy to work with her, she is very down-to-earth and not arrogant.”

Every time Jenner posts an Instagram photo of her nails, Kondratyeva says she gets tens of thousands of page clicks and thousands of new followers. She is also often credited as Jenner's nail artist in the media.

The explosion in popularity has had its downsides, she said, mainly in the form of negative attention from fellow Russian-speaking women living in the U.S. One of Kondratyeva's recent Instagram posts, dedicated to her "haters," shows a manicured Jenner giving two middle fingers.

Embed:



Посмотреть эту публикацию в Instagram

Публикация от Lisa Kon.Official page. (@lisa_kon_)

“When you become just a tiny bit famous and people start talking about you, some of them won’t like you,” she said. “Many think: ‘I also came here and I do [nails] well, but no one really knows me and when I increase prices, I lose my clients — so how can this chick live in LA and have everything she wants?’”

But Kondratyeva doesn’t let it faze her.

“Many people are unable to be happy for others. If you stand out, then there will be haters. That’s totally normal.”

While Kondratyeva misses her family and certain things about Russia, she and her husband have no plans to move back anytime soon.

“Many people come to the U.S. with particular expectations and get disappointed that things haven’t been handed to them on a silver platter,” she said.

“We knew from the beginning that if we want to achieve something, we’d have to work a lot, so everything is more or less how we imagined it to be.”

Embed:

Посмотреть эту публикацию в Instagram



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